International Loan Exhibition Examines Early Empires of Northern and Eastern Africa and their Connection with Byzantium

Wednesday April 10, 2024

Diptych with Twelve Apostles & St. Paul, c. 1700. Workshop or Circle of Wäldä Maryam (Ethiopia, active mid- to late 1600s-early 1700s).

Download the Press Kit

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Once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see nearly 160 secular and sacred artworks, including many that have never before been exhibited in the United States

CLEVELAND (April 10, 2024)—Experience nearly 160 works of secular and sacred art from across geographies and faiths in the Cleveland Museum of Art's newest exhibition, *Africa & Byzantium*. From monumental frescoes, mosaics, and luxury goods such as metalwork and jewelry to panel paintings, architectural elements, textiles, and illuminated manuscripts, the exhibition explores the great civilizations that created their own unique arts while also building a shared visual culture across the regions linked by the Mediterranean and Red Seas, the Nile River, and the Sahara Desert. On view from Sunday, April 14, through Sunday, July 21, 2024, in the Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation Exhibition Hall, *Africa & Byzantium* examines a convergence of art and culture that shaped the world.

Three centuries after ancient Egypt's pharaohs ended their rule, new African rulers built empires in the continent's north and east. Spanning from the Aksumite Empire in present-day Ethiopia and Eritrea to Nubia's Christian kingdoms in present-day Sudan, these complex civilizations cultivated economic, political, and cultural relationships with one another. The Byzantine Empire (Byzantium)—inheritor of the Roman Empire—also participated in these artistic and cultural networks as it briefly expanded into northern Africa (present-day Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Egypt).

"*Africa & Byzantium* considers the complex artistic relationships between northern and eastern African Christian kingdoms and the Byzantine Empire from the fourth century CE and beyond," said Dr. Kristen Windmuller-Luna, curator of African art at the CMA. "Lent from collections in Africa, Europe, and North America, many works have never been exhibited in the US. Most were made by African artists or imported to the continent at the request of the powerful rulers of precolonial kingdoms and empires. The art and faith of these historical kingdoms—including Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—resonate with many worldwide today."

The cultural and artistic relationships between distinct northeastern African kingdoms and the neighboring Byzantine Empire have previously been understudied. *Africa & Byzantium* introduces rich visual traditions from these regions, broadens public understanding of who and what comprised the Byzantine world (including its short 300 years on the African continent), and highlights the varied ways that polities and peoples across the Mediterranean Sea and Nile River basin interacted artistically and politically.

The CMA's presentation is bolstered by loans from two local religious communities, reflecting years of community collaboration that powerfully demonstrates the contemporary relevance of the exhibition's topic today. "Our work with local religious

communities has been very meaningful," continued Windmuller-Luna. "We are grateful for their willingness to tell their stories and loan their precious artworks to us. To share these Greater Clevelanders' vivid perspectives, we have placed Community Voice labels throughout the exhibition, offering a firsthand glimpse of artworks' personal significance. We have also included Community Voice videos in this exhibition, a first for the CMA."

Here are highlights of the CMA's presentation of *Africa & Byzantium*:

- A recently acquired Ethiopian Orthodox Christian diptych painted by Wäldä Maryam or his workshop around 1700
- Three larger-than-life medieval frescoes from Sudan's Cathedral of Faras depicting the Virgin Mary, as well as Nubians protected by saints and Christ himself
- The only icon painting by Angelos Akotantos (Cretan, d. 1450) in an American museum collection (CMA)

This once-in-a-lifetime international loan exhibition builds on the CMA's legacy of nearly a century of exhibitions about arts from important African civilizations and cultures. *Africa & Byzantium* also reflects the CMA's efforts since 2020 to present a broader view of African creativity, including the debut of northern African art in the permanent collection galleries and the museum's first pan-continental presentation of African textiles in *Stories from Storage* in 2021.

Northern African arts have been part of the CMA's collection since 1914. Perhaps best known are pharaonic-era Egyptian objects, among Africa's most celebrated artworks. The CMA's northern African holdings also include fine textiles and jewelry that Jeptha H. Wade II and his family purchased in Egypt, Algeria, and Tunisia. *Africa & Byzantium* aligns with the CMA's goals of sharing a broad view of African artistic excellence and builds on the museum's long history of major exhibitions celebrating the arts of important African cultures and kingdoms.

The exhibition was organized in conjunction with the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Member Preview Day

Members see it FIRST and for FREE!

Members can view *Africa & Byzantium* first on the Member Preview Day, Saturday, April 13, 2:00–9:00 p.m. Join today and reserve free tickets.

Ticket Pricing

Adults $15; seniors, students $12; youth 18 and under and CMA members free.

The Cleveland Museum of Art welcomes Blue Star Families, active and retired members of the American military, and qualifying members of Museums for All with free admission.

The CMA recommends reserving tickets through its online platform by visiting the *Africa & Byzantium* exhibition webpage. Tickets can also be reserved by phone at 216-421-7350 or on-site at one of the ticket desks.

Tickets are expected to book quickly and are not guaranteed. Your first choice of date and time may not be available, so please have other date and time options in mind when reserving tickets. Advance ticket sales are highly recommended.

Complementary Programming

Aleksandra Vrebalov
Friday, April 12, 2024, 7:30–9:00 p.m.
Ames Family Atrium
Free; no ticket required

Aleksandra Vrebalov's music ranges from concert music and opera to music for modern dance and film, and it has been performed by Kronos Quartet, Serbian National Theater, English National Ballet, Belgrade Philharmonic Orchestra, and many others. Vrebalov's string quartet . . . *hold me, neighbor, in this storm* . . . was commissioned by Carnegie Hall and premiered by Kronos Quartet. As a Serbian expat, Vrebalov is the recipient of the Golden Emblem from the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for lifelong dedication and contribution to her native country's culture. She is also the 2024 winner of the Grawemeyer Award in Music Composition.

Inspired by *Icon of the Mother of God and Infant Christ (Virgin Eleousa)* on view in the Robert P. Bergman Memorial Gallery (gallery 105), Vrebalov performs *Antennae*, a site-specific concert in the galleries and Ames Family Atrium. Commissioned by the CMA in partnership with the Cleveland Foundation, this evening-length work for large choir, organs, trumpets, and percussion features members of esteemed vocal ensemble Cappella Romana singing Byzantine chant, surrounded by 20 singers and other musicians from the community.

"Bright as the Sun": *Africa & Byzantium* at the Cleveland Museum of Art

Speaker: Dr. Kristen Windmuller-Luna, Curator of African Art, The Cleveland Museum of Art

Wednesday, April 17, 2024, 5:00–6:00 p.m.

Gartner Auditorium

Free; ticket required

Join Dr. Kristen Windmuller to learn more about the groundbreaking international loan show *Africa & Byzantium*. This talk reflects on key works in the exhibition, special elements of Cleveland's presentation, and a behind-the-scenes curatorial perspective on its creation.

This talk is supported by the Mellon Foundation.

***Africa & Byzantium* Tours**

Daily on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from Tuesday, April 23, through Sunday, July 14, 2024

The Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation Exhibition Hall

Tours meet at exhibition entrance

Paid ticket required; free for members

Exhibition tours of *Africa & Byzantium* are offered at 2:30 p.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, and at 6:00 p.m. on Wednesdays, from April 23 through July 14; ticket required.

To schedule private tours for adult groups of 10 or more, please contact grouptours@clevelandart.org or call 216-707-2752.

All Members Curator Lecture of *Africa & Byzantium*

Friday, April 12, 2024, 3:00–4:00 p.m.

Gartner Auditorium

Free; ticket required

Dr. Kristen Windmuller-Luna, curator of African art, gives a behind-the-scenes view of the uniquely Cleveland presentation of the exhibition *Africa & Byzantium*. Learn more about the exquisite artworks lent from collections in Africa, Europe, and North America; the innovative exhibition design; and how connections with Northeast Ohio faith and heritage communities shaped the CMA's presentation.

Artist in the Atrium: Visualizing Devotion

Artist: George Makary

Saturday, April 20, 2024, 11:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m.
Ames Family Atrium

Every third Saturday of each month, stop by the Ames Family Atrium between 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. to get a firsthand look at the art-making process. Each session provides the opportunity to engage and interact with a different Northeast Ohio maker during pop-up demonstrations and activities. See their work unfold and learn how artists create. Explore a related selection of authentic objects from the CMA's education art collection in a pop-up Art Up Close session. See, think, and wonder.

Join Canadian-Egyptian artist George Makary for a special rendition of Artist in the Atrium as he paints a life-size icon inspired by objects in *Africa & Byzantium*. Learn about contemporary icon painting during Makary's live demonstration, ask him about his artistic process, or participate in your own art-making activity connected to *Africa & Byzantium*.

This live demonstration continues beyond the Artist in the Atrium event. Join us in the atrium at the following times to see Makary's painting develop:

Sunday, April 21, 10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m.

Tuesday, April 23, 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Wednesday, April 24, 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.

Visit the *Africa & Byzantium* exhibition to see how this work connects to painting traditions in Coptic art, including the CMA's own sixth-century tapestry of the Virgin and Child.

This program is possible thanks to a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, which supports the Cleveland Museum of Art and Case Western Reserve University's joint program in art history and museum studies.

Art and Faith Now: A Conversation with Art Historian Dr. Raymond Silverman and Painter George Makary

Wednesday, April 24, 2024, 6:00–7:00 p.m.

Gartner Auditorium

Free; ticket required

Join us for a lively conversation between art historian Dr. Raymond Silverman and artist George Makary as they consider the contemporary religious arts of Ethiopian Orthodoxy and Coptic Orthodoxy, as well as the role of museums in presenting historical and contemporary arts of faith. Makary provides insight into the artist's role in making effective religious paintings (icons) for the Coptic Orthodox community, while Silverman draws from more than three decades of field-based research working with and interviewing artists in Ethiopia. The discussion is moderated by Dr. Kristen Windmuller-Luna (curator of African art at the CMA and curator of the CMA's exhibition *Africa & Byzantium*).

This talk is supported by the Mellon Foundation.

The exhibition is organized by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Cleveland Museum of Art.

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Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this exhibition do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

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About the Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art (CMA) is renowned for the quality and breadth of its collection, which includes more than 63,000 artworks and spans 6,000 years of achievement in the arts. The museum is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarship and performing arts and is a leader in digital innovation. One of the leading encyclopedic art museums in the United States, the CMA is recognized for its award-winning Open Access program—which provides free digital access to images and information about works in the museum's collection—and free of charge to all. The museum is located in the University Circle neighborhood with two satellite locations on Cleveland's west side: the Community Arts Center and Transformer Station.

The museum is supported in part by residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture and made possible in part by the Ohio Arts Council (OAC), which receives support from the State of Ohio and the National Endowment for the Arts. The OAC is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally, and economically. For more information about the museum and its holdings, programs, and events, call 888-CMA-0033 or visit cma.org.